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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7573  
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1179  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4723  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8267  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5829  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1589  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1596  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000365

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/12/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [EAID](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: NO EVIDENCE RELIEF SUPPLIES ARE BEING  
DIVERTED

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Classified By: P/E Chief Leslie Hayden for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Embassy Rangoon has combed all of Rangoon's markets and found no evidence that donated humanitarian relief supplies have been diverted and sold. Likewise, NGOs and UN staff in the Delta told us they have seen no evidence relief supplies have been diverted from there either. The UN continues to make monitoring one of its highest priorities. Pro-democracy activists eager to relate their accounts of the regime diverting assistance offered us no specifics of any incidents and acknowledged they were reporting rumors and exile media reports. Embassy Rangoon urges caution in responding to the unsubstantiated reporting in the exile media. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) To investigate the alarmist reports coming from the Burmese exiles that international donations of relief commodities were being diverted and sold in Rangoon markets, Embassy Rangoon dispatched several of its local staff to various major Rangoon markets to examine goods for sale and interview vendors. Although our staff found locally made blankets, mosquito nets, candles, and flashlights in stock, we did not find one single example of international relief commodities being sold. One suspicious package of Thai biscuits was purchased and brought back to the embassy where a Thai speaking staff member identified it as a package of chocolate cookies commonly sold in Thailand with large Thai writing on the package stating "Buy one get one free."

¶3. (SBU) Emboffs have also spoken with several NGOs working in the affected areas, including Adventist Development Relief Agency, Save the Children, METTA, World Vision, Karen Baptist Convention, and Karen Development Network. All have heard the various rumors circulating regarding the diversion of relief supplies, but none have seen any evidence this is happening. Likewise, the hundreds of UN local staff working in the Delta report that assistance is being delivered. They have seen no evidence of large-scale diversions. The UN informed us today they have specifically instructed their staff to monitor assistance deliveries and report any diversion or mishandling back to UN headquarters. Communication with the Delta remains difficult, they emphasized, but proper monitoring of assistance remained a

top priority for the UN.

¶4. (C) Pol/econ chief also met with political activists eager to tell her about the rampant diversion of assistance. When questioned about the details of the reports, the activists could not give any specifics including places, dates, or times. When asked the source of their information, the activists said they were repeating rumors or reports from exile media, such as DVB and RFA.

¶5. (C) Comment: It is easy to believe the worst of Burma's military regime. Embassy Rangoon has no doubt, as in the case of other natural disasters around the world, some international assistance may be diverted or not used as it was intended. However, we have seen no evidence this is happening here on a scale large enough to be detected. False rumors are always circulating in Rangoon, throughout the country, and especially in the exile communities that are cut off from Burma and not in tune with the situation on the ground. Many of the activists we met with who were eager to tell us the rumors they had heard about the military diverting assistance are sending this information to the exile media, who they contact on a regular basis. It is not only the military that has motive to politicize international assistance.

¶6. (C) While international humanitarian assistance may not be being distributed as efficiently and quickly as we wish, it is reaching those in need (septel). The UN and international NGOs are slowly convincing the Rangoon and Nay Pyi Taw bureaucrats to open their doors a little more every day and accept the assistance. Repeating unfounded rumors and accusing the GOB of pilfering assistance before there is a credible basis for doing so is the fastest way to slam this

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door shut. If that happens, the 2 million people who desperately need this assistance will not get it. Embassy Rangoon is working closely with the UN and international and local NGOs to monitor relief supplies as closely as possible.

We have also assigned two officers to coordinate and monitor relief flights coming into Rangoon airport. If we detect significant diversions, we will report them. This system may not be perfect, but it is the best we have under tremendously difficult circumstances. End comment.

VILLAROSA